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ABSTRACT

This article emphasizes the importance of including an athletic trainer who is a qualified sports medicine professional in organized school sport programs, particularly football. Educational requirements for persons who wish to go into this profession are outlined, as well as employment opportunities. (JD)

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THE ATHLETIC TRAINER: NECESSITY OR LUXURY?

There is inherent risk in sports. The very nature of the "all out" exertion required and the situations which require body contact or the striking or throwing of missiles create a variety of situations in which injuries occur.[1]

In recent years studies compiled by the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System and the National Athletic Injury/Illness Reporting System indicate a steady increase in the number of injuries and fatalities resulting from participation in sport. The studies also indicate an increasing number of participants both male and female.

A high school athlete participating in a full season of practice and games has a 20 percent chance of being injured during the season and an 8 percent chance of incurring a serious injury. More players are injured in practice than during a game. There is no team sport anywhere in the world in which injury occurs more frequently than American football.[2]

If the risks of athletic competition are to be justified, the athlete must be protected against injury and receive proper medical care when injured. Too often medical supervision of athletes is left to coaches, equipment managers, or other unqualified individuals. The American Medical Association's athlete's bill of rights states that the athlete has the right to expect proper medical care.

[1] Klofs, C., and Arnheim, D.: Modern Principles of Athletic Training. Saint Louis, Mo.: C.V. Mosby Co., 1977.

[2] Mueller, F.O., and Blyth, C.S.: North Carolina high school football injury study; equipment and prevention, J. Sports Med. 2:1, 1974.

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The athletic trainer is a qualified sports medicine professional. The American Medical Association recognizes the National Athletic Trainers' Association as an allied medical profession. The majority of high schools do not employ an athletic trainer. Many of the injuries incurred could be prevented if proper care was taken prior to competitions and practices. An athletic trainer is reponsible for the prevention and care of injuries.

The prevention of injury encompasses several areas. Prior to the season the trainer should work closely with the team physician in planning a comprehensive physical for each athlete. The trainer is also responsible for aiding in the development of preseason conditioning programs. An unfit athlete is an excellent prospect for injury.

Careful attention should be given to the proper selection and fitting of equipment. It is every athlete's right to expect good equipment. The certified trainer is very aware of the importance of equipment and its implications for injury reduction.

In addition to equipment, protective strapping is sometimes required to aid in the prevention of injuries or to protect an injured part from sustaining further insult. Strapping should be used in conjunction with strengthening exercises for the weakened body part. Therefore, the athletic trainer must be skilled in conditioning and rehabilitative exercises.

The trainer must be skilled in emergency care and evaluative techniques. In addition, the trainer should be prepared to counsel the athlete in proper nutrition, rest and conditioning.

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

There are four avenues to becoming certified. The first is to

complete an athletic training curriculum. There are forty-four universities that offer N.A.T.A. approved curriculums. Four of these institutions offer graduate programs. The student must meet certain general course requirements as well as specific training course requirements. There is a heavy emphasis in the sciences; anatomy, physiology, physiology of exercise, and kinesiology are necessary foundations. Nutrition, school health, remedial exercise and first-aid or EMT classes are also required. In addition to the course work, six-hundred clock hours of practical experience in the training room are required.

The second avenue to certification is the apprenticeship route. The category may be attained at institutions that do not have curriculums. In addition to the general requirements, letters of recommendation from the team physician and the supervising trainer must be forwarded to the N.A.T.A. Eighteen-hundred clock hours of practical experience in the clinic are required.

Trainers who are actively engaged in the profession but are not certified fall into the third category. The general requirements remain the same. Letters of recommendation from the team physician and N.A.T.A. supervising trainer are needed. The individual must show proof of five years' experience.

The last method one may use to become certified is to become a physical therapist. The basic requirements remain the same.

After fulfilling course and clinical requirements, certification is still not guaranteed. The National Athletic Trainer's certification examination must be satisfactorily completed. It consists of a three and one-half hour written examination and a half hour oral practical examination.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

A nationwide study to indicate the need for trainers is underway. A number of legislators have introduced and reintroduced bills which would require that an athletic trainer be employed at each institution holding athletic competition.

At a time when positions are being eliminated and money is severely limited, it may be difficult to justify hiring a person whose only duties are athletic training. The National Trainers' Association no longer requires a teaching certificate in physical education or health. A high school may employ a trainer capable of teaching a variety of subjects.

A number of school districts are hiring district trainers to service a group of schools or all the schools in a particular district. The trainer is located in a central training room. This reduces the cost of both staff and facilities for each school.

Faculty retraining is another alternative to providing proper medical care for athletes. An interested member of the faculty can be sent to clinics to learn athletic training skills. The Northwestern Sports Medicine Center provides this type of faculty retraining.

Colleges and universities already employ many trainers. However, with the growth of women's athletics there are an increasing number of full-time positions and graduate assistantships available for women. Employment at a university generally falls into one of three categories. Many trainers are employed by staff assignment to the athletic department. Others serve as teacher-trainers, teaching classes in the morning and performing training duties in the afternoon. A combination physical therapist-athletic trainer is often retained to work in the student

health center in the mornings and in the training room in the afternoons.

Professional teams offer some opportunities for employment. The rate of turn-overs in the professional ranks is low and a number of years of experience at the college level is usually a prerequisite to being accepted into the ranks of the professional teams.

ROLE IN PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

As a physical educator it is your responsibility to make more students aware of the athletic training field. While creating this awareness you must also be capable of relating the duties and responsibilities of the position to the student. Many students enter a training curriculum for a very brief period of time because they are unaware of the number of hours a trainer must dedicate to the athlete. Training is very rarely a glamorous position. A good trainer is always in the background.

Administrators need to develop a greater awareness as to need for trainers; too often they feel that the coach can perform this service. This practice is a disservice to both the coach and the athlete. In a time when legal liability is a question in the minds of many persons, it is foolish to take the risk of not having a qualified sports medicine professional to treat our aspiring young athletes.